

PINK FLOYD

Concert special for band, too

By Michael St. John
Music writer

If you were wondering where Murphy's infamous law — "if it can go wrong, it will" — was being enforced last Sunday, it was on the arrangements we had made for an interview with Pink Floyd drummer Nick Mason.

He was scheduled to call at 9 a.m. from Toronto.

He eventually phoned after 5 p.m. from Philadelphia.

With a sound check for that evening's concert in progress at the same time, the conversation was quickly paced.

It has been 15 years since Pink Floyd last played Madison at the Coliseum. Now, the Floyd was going to be the first band (other than the University's marchers and Drum Corps International competitors), to perform at Camp Randall Stadium. How did the British superstars feel about that?

"Great," Mason began. "It's nicer to play for people who haven't seen us for a while, or who haven't seen us before, in new venues. It sort of gives it a more 'special occasion' feel."

Another "special" occasion has recently occurred for Pink Floyd, but not one that inspired celebration. After 725 consecutive weeks, the 1973 LP "Dark Side of the Moon" has dropped off Billboard magazine's record charts.

Mason admitted, "We're a little sad, really," and followed with a cheery, "Now I think we'll just have to get it back up there."

With more than a dozen albums to pick from and the task of pleasing fans who span two generations, Mason said entries for the song list of this show only had to meet two criteria.

"We're doing what we most like to play," he said, "and what we thought would be the most interesting visually with some of the tricks, effects and so on. We're trying, as well, to take a selection from some of the albums that we particularly like, obviously from 'Dark Side of the Moon,' a little from 'The Wall,' bits from 'Wish You Were Here,' that sort of thing."

Mason said choosing the material was a cinch compared to assembling the mammoth show.

"We started thinking about the show about halfway through the recording of 'Momentary Lapse of

Reason.' We've got great musicians," he boasted, speaking of the backup singers and five instrumentalists. "The music rehearsals were relatively simple. The production rehearsals took longer. I should think it was about six months from the preliminary design of the stage, the lighting and the production thoughts to the point where we were ready to go."

Solo projects by the Floyd's core trio, which includes singer-guitarist David Gilmour and multikeyboardist Richard Wright, were not considered.

"The feeling really was that this is a Pink Floyd tour," Mason stated. "Consequently, we've steered clear of Dave's, mine and Rich's solo stuff."

There's still plenty of room for self-expression, however, in the form of improvisation.

"There's certainly more than there was, for instance, in 'The Wall,' which was a very well-structured show," said Mason. "This show is structured, but there's a lot more room to just . . . play."

The dynamic timekeeper of the band that has made a trademark of punctuating itself with mechanical sounds like cash registers and helicopters, as well as blood-chilling screams and explosions, Mason readily offered his feelings about electronic vs. "real" drumming.

"We've always used lots of electronics. I'm in favor of them," he said with conviction. "I don't think they detract from the real drums. In fact, on this tour I'm using mainly acoustic drums, and Gary, our percussion player, is doing a lot of the electronic stuff."

"On the album ('Momentary Lapse. . .'), we used a great mixture of real drums, electronics, samples (recording real drums and manipulating the playback) of my drums, and so on," Mason said. "I don't think they're taking the drummer's job away. Once a sample has been done, it's obsolete and anyone making a good record should be able to go out and make a better sound."

An undeniable mystique has surrounded Pink Floyd from the start. Largely responsible is an often cynical and surreal outlook that has ranged from the eerie "Set the Controls for the Heart of the Sun" and classic opus "Echoes," to the social slashers "Money" and the group's

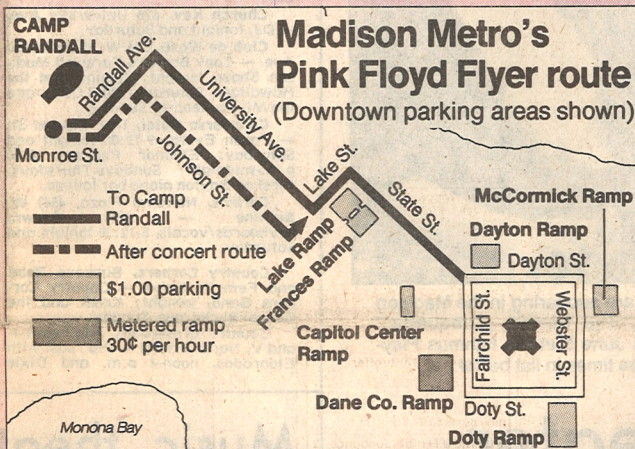


Pink Floyd

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Guitarist David Gilmour, left, and drummer Nick Mason.



biggest single hit, "Another Brick in the Wall, Part 2."

Asked if he or his cronies were influenced by metaphysical practices or beliefs, Mason responded, "Not specifically. To an extent, we've been influenced by literature that's been, I wouldn't just say fashionable, but the different things that people have been deeply interested in over the past 20 years."

When the recently reported link between our president and astrology was mentioned, Mason commented with a chuckle, "I don't think we're similar to the White House in that respect."

Guitarist Gilmour has said there is no end in sight for Pink Floyd. Did Mason, 42, mates Gilmour, 39, and Wright, 47, believe they could continue for another couple of decades?

"I don't know about another 20-odd years," he cracked. "That would make us quite elderly. But if Frank Sinatra can do it, then I guess . . . well, this certainly isn't a farewell tour or anything like that."

So what fuels the Floyd these days?

"One of the strongest attractions is that we draw a wide variety of people," Mason said. "There are those who sort of grew up with us, then there's a new younger generation that finds us interesting. In a

way, that's the best kind of audience to have and that's what keeps the band moving along instead of getting tied in with nostalgia."

Pink Floyd has only undergone two central personnel changes in its history. Initial leader Syd Barrett left a legacy of near-lunacy when he burned out during Floyd's infancy in the late '60s. Bassist and prime mover Roger Waters made his controversial exit early in this decade.

Mason was candid about the after-effects.

"You do have a nucleus of the loyal fans that stay with you," he said, "but you also drop some because there are some people who think that when Syd Barrett left, the Floyd wasn't the same. I'm sure there are those who also think that with Roger gone. But as you produce new material, you also create this new generation of fans."

Mother Nature hasn't always cooperated with the rain-or-shine outdoor presentation, Mason said. "Some of the crew are starting to call this the Pink Flood Tour," he said with a laugh. "But it didn't snow in Denver and that was the forecast."

Fans old and new can count on a well-honed show in Madison, equal to its status as a historic local event, Mason promised.